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ABSTRACT

This brief paper describes a program to increase the number of Native American students identified and placed in one Albuquerque, New Mexico, elementary school's gifted education program. Introductory information notes the general underrepresentation of Native Americans in gifted education programs and their disproportionately high representation in remedial special education programs. Prior to this program's implementation, the target elementary school had no Native American students identified as gifted, even though Indian students comprised 11.8 percent of the school's enrollment. A voluntary after school and summer enrichment program was created to address the cognitive and affective domains of students in grades 3-5. The Ohiyesa program used cooperative learning, team-building, demonstration, and modeling activities in a program designed to build cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic skills. More than 150 children and their families participated in the program during the first 5 years. In 1997-98, following program implementation, statistics indicated that eight of the 26 identified gifted program participants were considered Native American, all of whom attended the Ohiyesa program. (Contains 15 references.) (DB)

Advocates for Success: Creating an Innovative Educational model

For Diverse Special Populations

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An after school and summer enrichment program was developed to meet the needs of Native American elementary school students. Native American students were not represented in the school's gifted education program even though they comprised a large number of the students enrolled. Already identified gifted students and any interested Native American students were invited to voluntarily participate in the program. One of the goals of the program was to dramatically increase the number of Native American students identified and placed in the school's gifted education program. This goal was achieved. This article will describe the program and provide an argument to the reader for the need to implement similar programs to meet the needs of underserved and at-risk gifted students.

Introduction

Native American children receive inadequate learning experiences in the nation's public schools (Reyhner, 1992). The Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (1991) found that "our schools have failed to nurture the intellectual development and academic performance of many Native children, as is evident from their high dropout rates and negative attitudes towards school (p.1)" Furthermore, Native American children often receive inadequate

grades and meaningful experiences to enable those who do graduate the opportunity to attend and succeed at the post-secondary level (Raborn, 2000).

Approximately 487,000 Native American children are enrolled in public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Research suggests that a disproportionately high number of these students are identified and placed in remedial special education programs (Artiles and Trent, 1994). Statistics from the 19th Annual Report to Congress by the Office of Special Education Programs (U.S. Department of Education, 1999) indicate that minority children still continue to be over-represented in specific areas of exceptionality. According to the latest Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (1992), Native Americans have the highest rate of disability of any racial or ethnic group (Brasher, 1995).

The under-representation of Native American and other minority children in gifted education has been identified as a national problem (Ortiz and Vellof, 1987; Maker, Nielsen, and Rogers, 1994; Plucker, Callahan, and Tomchin, 1996; Maker, 1996; Raborn, et. al., 1996). The U.S. Department of Education Report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993) states that, "the talents of disadvantaged and minority children have been especially neglected" and that "we must work to ensure that a significant number of students from all races, ethnic groups, and income levels are among our top performers (p. 1)." The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1998, which looked at eighth graders from throughout the nation, found the following representation of ethnic groups in gifted and talented programs:

17.6 % of Asian students
9.0 % of White, non-Hispanic students
7.9 % of Black students
6.7 % of Hispanic students
2.1 % of Native American students

- 8.8 % of all 8th grade students were considered gifted or talented

Statistics from the New Mexico State Department of Education (1995) indicated a large gap between ethnic group representation in the general public school student population and gifted and talented programs. While Native American students comprised 10.4 % of the state's total school population, they represented but 3.5 % of the gifted constituency. Conversely, whereas 73.96 % of all identified gifted and talented students were considered Anglo-American, they represented but 41.2 % of the state's general school population. At the local education/district level, the statistics again virtually mirrored the state with 76.08 % of the gifted and talented student population considered Anglo-American and only 3.7 % Native American. Even greater still, at the high school cluster level, representing the home high school, three middle schools, and nine elementary schools, with a total of 9,974 students, only 12 Native American students were identified as gifted the second semester of 1996 (APS, 20-day reports). The target elementary

school, which this study will present, had four or 33 % of the total number of cluster Native American gifted students. Two other cluster sister elementary schools with Native American student populations of 19.1 % (out of 729 total school students) and 12.2 % (out of 745 total school students) had a total of zero Native American gifted students. Previous to program implementation, the target elementary school had a total of zero Native American students identified as gifted even though Indian students comprised 11.8 % of the total school enrollment of 575 students.

The Program

A program was developed in the fall of 1993 to address the needs of two unique populations: the Native American student and the already identified gifted student. The Native American population of approximately 84 students represented almost 50 % of the total number of participants in the school's special education programs. In addition, a large number of these students attended Title One or received tutoring services from the school's Indian Education teacher. As a group, these students were not being successful. Nineteen students were identified and placed in the school's gifted education program. Sixteen were Anglo-American, three Hispanic, and zero Native American. Most of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEP's) with affective goals directed towards cooperative sharing and leadership and in honoring, appreciating, and accepting the unique differences in others. As a group, these students often did not realize their cognitive potential due to affective difficulties.

The program was implemented on an after school and summer basis beginning in January of 1994. Created to address the cognitive and affective domains, it provided fun and challenging academic and social/team-building experiences to third, fourth, and fifth grade students. Included among the students participating in the program since its inception were those considered learning disabled, behavior disordered, communicative disordered, and gifted, as well as the typical, non-exceptional student.

Ohiyesa (O-ya-sa), the name given to the program, was also the Santee Sioux name given to Dr. Charles Eastman. As a child during the mid-1800's, Eastman earned the name of Ohiyesa or "The Winner" for his determination and athletic prowess (Wilson, 1992).

Raised to be a great hunter and warrior, Dr. Eastman took full advantage of the educational opportunities offered by the White society, attending Knox College, Dartmouth, and finally the Boston University School of Medicine. The career of Ohiyesa included the title of traveling Secretary for the YMCA, medical doctor on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and author and international lecturer. His life serves as an inspiration to all who participate in the program.

Among the four original faculty members were the Indian Education teacher, the special education department chair and gifted teacher, the school counselor, and the school speech and language pathologist. The University of New Mexico Director of Bilingual/Multicultural Special Education programs served as consultant and provided many of the theoretical framework ideas and suggestions used to design the program. The

initial group of children consisted of twenty-four participants evenly divided between Native American and non-Native American students.

A math, science, and leadership curriculum partially based upon the gifted curriculum suggested by VanTassel-Baska (1994) was initially implemented using cooperative learning, team-building, demonstration, and modeling activities. Four specific areas were integrated into the program design:

1. Cognitive: science and math
2. Affective: motivation, self-concept, social skills, and sensitivity
3. Social: group dynamics, leadership styles and traits, and ethical decision-making
4. Aesthetic: visual arts, music, drama, and dance

Theoretical Frameworks

A rich environment with ample opportunities to freely interact in a variety of activities and with a minimum of judgment and pressure were considered important components of the Ohiyesa program. All students were seen as individuals with unique gifts and talents to contribute. All were allowed to voice their opinion and concerns. The entire family and school community were always invited and encouraged to participate. Often, their unique

talents were put to use. The Native American students realized a sense of pride in their culture as it was shared and valued by all.

Knowledge was freely distributed and the students' voices and experiences were heard. The constant give-and-take between students as they explored and learned from one another created a true environment of cooperation, co-participation, and joint discovery, as they learned to co-construct together (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Some of the Ohiyesa goals were directed towards this end by emphasizing that the children will "be encouraged to develop an enthusiasm for school and learning." This was possible in an environment that did not judge with a report card grade, pink slip for discipline, or note sent home. The students jointly developed program rules and parameters, and helped select activities. It was a program designed to provide fun and enrichment. Participation by the entire family was openly sought and encouraged. Several evening family night activities and potluck gatherings provided the adults with some of the very same types of social interaction and growth experienced by their children. Native American storytellers, a family math night, and presentations on "The Magic of Science" and "How to Help Your Child Succeed in School" were examples of a few of the activities. Faculty and staff were encouraged to investigate and participate. Many were invited to give guest presentations to the group. In addition, in-service training was provided to distribute information on traits and characteristics of the typical and not-so-typical gifted child. Teachers were encouraged to seek out and refer previously overlooked potential gifted students.

Program Results

Statistics for the 1997-1998 school year indicated that eight of the twenty-six identified gifted program participants, or 31 %, were considered Native American. All eight attended the Ohiyesa program. Week-to-week and year-to-year participation remained over 90 %. Well over 150 children and their families participated in the program during the first five years. Several of the program "graduates" have returned to serve as role models and "assistant teachers." Ongoing yearly survey results by the children and parents revealed overwhelming continued support and enthusiasm for the program. Information was also gathered and used to improve the program. Grades of the Ohiyesa Native American participants have consistently outpaced those of their non-participant counterparts. Observations of positive social and affective development for all students have occurred. Many have realized growth through positions of leadership in their classes and school. Comparison data with the previously mentioned sister cluster schools revealed no change in their Native American gifted population.

Conclusion

According to Hausfather (1996), knowledge is often not fairly distributed on an equal basis within our public schools, and in fact is used as a source of power over the students. Student voices and experiences are often silenced in the process. In an environment conducive to providing and encouraging all participants to actively engage, a learning

community is developed that allows all its members to contribute despite having unequal knowledge concerning the topic studied. Just such a community emerged from the Ohiyesa experience. Despite our differences, we learned that we had much more in common and thus welcomed and openly shared what differences we did have as gifts from one to another. In doing so we all became winners.

Jim Raborn is an Accountability Coordinator (RDA) with the Albuquerque Public Schools and part-time faculty with the University of New Mexico.

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